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BODY AND SOUL

ELIZABETH MARSH



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BODY AND SOUL

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ELIZABETH H. MARSH



THE CORNHILL COMPANY

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one |

*TO THE EYES THAT
FORESEE.*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

BODY of Lord Barcardon

SOUL of Lord Barcardon

THE ABBOT PAUL, enemy of Lord Barcardon

BASIL, the son of Lord Barcardon, a little boy

DICK DODGE, a clown

JACK STRONG, an old soldier

A TAVERN KEEPER

A WEAVER

ACOLYTES

SERVANT

CONSTANCE, the wife of Lord Barcardon

AUDREY, the daughter of Lord Barcardon, a little girl

A WIDOW

THE WEAVER'S WIFE

ACT I.

Time: The beginning of modern incredulity.

SCENE I

The apse and altar of an abbey chapel.

Before the chancel are lighted tapers, surrounding a bier. At the turning of the north transept, against the great pillar is a tall crucifix.

[Enter by the south transept, six Brothers as acolytes, bearing the body of Lord Barcardon, with the pall and insignia of a marshal, a sword on his breast. They place the Body on the bier. Four of them take their seats about it in the rigid posture of watchers. Two come down the aisle, and stand a moment at the corner of the north transept, looking toward the bier.]

FIRST BEARER

There he lies, toasted up in candle light,
As though he were a bishop.

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SECOND BEARER

Peace! He's dead.

FIRST BEARER

And, living, he believed no more in God
Than you believe in Baal . . . or Mahomet.

SECOND BEARER

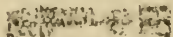
Gramercy, let him take what warmth he may,
For me. Mind you, he drove Jack Frost outdoor,
For more folk than you could count candles yonder.

FIRST BEARER

I know. But you or I . . suppose . . yourself .
You, . . . if you died tonight where, think you,
would
You be?

SECOND BEARER

[*Bowing his head*]



I would commit my soul to God.

BODY AND SOUL

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FIRST BEARER

And if you could not make yourself believe . . .
In God?

SECOND BEARER

[After staring and crossing himself]

Keep still! I take the sacrament
Most regular.

FIRST BEARER

I've knelt beside you, man,
At times when I have known that you but half
Belived.

SECOND BEARER

No! no!

FIRST BEARER

Suppose you died at one
Such time or other . . . without God to succor
you.
Would you return unto your mother's breast?

SECOND BEARER

[*Shaking his head*]

I can't think what I'd do, if I were dead,—
Believing not in God.

FIRST BEARER

Oh, you are clean
Without imagination, man!

SECOND BEARER

Keep still!
You see too much! I say you frighten me.

FIRST BEARER

Your body, man, shall be like this some day,
Your soul . . . God wot what this man's soul will
say.

They go out. Stillness a moment.

SCENE II

As before. Three of the watchers have fallen asleep, and the head of the fourth drops shortly after the curtain rises.

[Enter the Soul of Lord Barcardon as a vaporous form.]

SOUL

Awake!

BODY

[In sepulchral tones]

Oh sweetest sleep!

SOUL

Awake, rise, out! . . .

And succour me!

BODY

[Moves his hands stiffly]

Peace, peace! These hands . . . are cold
To counterbalance spear and sword. I've done
With victories.

SOUL

[With a cry]

Oh, save me!

BODY

Who art thou?

[Soul moans in grief]

Art thou the poor my bounty benefited?

Art thou the foe I doomed? But stay . . . art
thouArt thou . . . nay answer . . . thou the wife o' my
bosom?

Who art thou?

SOUL

Still thou knowest not?

BODY

Nay, art . . . ?

SOUL

Wine of thy throat, yea, dream beats of thy heart,
Flame of thy youth, thy soul am I.

BODY

My . . . Soul?

SOUL

Thy youth, and thy desires, thy dreams, thy deeds,
Thy soul,—and lost!

BODY

Lost?

SOUL

Lost.

BODY

So nigh?

SOUL

Nay, lost!

BODY

Peace.

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SOUL

"Peace!" Ha, I would sleep with thee!

BODY

Begone!

SOUL

I'd in, again, *again*, and sleep thy sleep.

*[Wrestles with the Body, raising it
to a sitting posture.]*

BODY

Have done!

SOUL

[Pleading]

Ah, succour me!

BODY

A load thou art.

[Points to the crucifix]

Thou hadst me there, all night upon my knees. . . .

Twelve hours before yon crucifix . . . when thou
And I were young.

SOUL

And I . . . I fell asleep.

BODY

Decades, thy weight hath borne me down; till I,
I too, desired to sleep.

[Falls back and closes his eyes.]

SOUL

Nay, Body, hark!
By these old eyelids, cold as fountains sealed,
Till thou take heed, thou shalt not sleep.

BODY

Sleep!

SOUL

Out,
Hard Body. Think not thou to lie all tombed
And snug beneath these chancel stones, whilst I,
Thy Soul, go wandering, alive and lost.

BODY

What is it to be lost?

SOUL

Fear without death,
Life without hope, pain without pity, cries
Without an echo.

BODY

Cries! . . . You cry . . . to whom?

SOUL

None, none!
There's grief's last frantic fiend-laid snare.

BODY

Alas, my Soul.

SOUL

[*With an outcry*]

Rise, Body!

BODY

[In dull, hoarse accents]

Nay, this clay
Is cold. Life blood will run no more about
In its old ruined keep.

SOUL

[Wailing]

My home, my home!

.

Have I not shaped me to the porcupines
And toads, and dream you that the beasts o' the
quag
Received me into cognizance? This night
Have I not sat, on peaks of yonder hills,
In eagle's plumes, cowering in cloven crags,
Unreckoned by the climbing clouds, and lost
Among the stars?

BODY

Poor Soul, poor silly Soul!

SOUL

'Tis dark perdition drives me down the wild,
Haunting thy bier, thy wise and secret smile,
For one bare recognition.

BODY

Witless Soul!

SOUL

For one bare recognition.

BODY

Shiftless Soul!

SOUL

Mock thou thy coffin, an thou mayest. But taunt
Not me.

BODY

Thy blindness mocks thee. Sight hast thou?
Scour thou the village. (*Reaches out an arm*)
Mark the houses each
Black draped, for WHOM? Why dost thou gasp,
my Soul?

Lift thou the latches, rusted stiff with tears:
And find some hearthstone, where my name abides.

SOUL

Body, I'm barer stripped than thou, that day
Thou saw'st the light.

BODY

Now, out upon thee. Up
From this cold clay. There's life blood, there asleep.
Take it, possess it.

SOUL

What, yon boy?

BODY

Ay, in!

Enter thou in!

SOUL

Oh, tempt me not.

BODY

That soul

He hath will not be disobedient:
Rule him, as I ruled thee. Out, up, begone!

[Soul, with a groan, approaches the sleeping acolyte, Brother Jude, covers him as a cloud, and disappears from sight. The Brother arises with stiff gestures, as one possessed. He calls out in the voice of the Soul, stretching forth his hands.]

SOUL

Lo, here I stand with alien hands and feet,
Lo, here I go, some answering soul to meet,
So, Body pitiless, I part from thee:
But in thy coldness keep a place for me.

SCENE III

One side of a narrow village street. In' the centre is a lighted tavern, with wide casement windows on each side of the door, through which is seen dimly a group round the hearth. On either side of the tavern are smaller houses more faintly lighted.

Each doorway is draped in black.

From the tavern is heard singing, at intervals.

[Enter Soul, in the guise of the acolyte, walking and speaking in constrained accents, still as one possessed. He bears an alms bowl in his hand. Knocks at the door on the right. It is opened by a weaver, slightly hunchback.]

WEAVER

Who comes here?

SOUL

I am one that comes to the living from the body of the dead.

WEAVER

Brother, I see you bear the garb of the Abbey
yonder: Come you from the corpse of Lord
Barcardon?

SOUL

I come from his cold clay.

WEAVER

Alack, alack!

SOUL

What have you to contribute to the peace of his
soul?

WEAVER

I have little enough, now that I must pay mine own
chimney tax, next Michaelmas.

SOUL

My Lord was wont to pay the tax for you?

WEAVER

Ay, that he did, God bless him. But now I must
do all for myself—I, a weaver, and with a lame
shoulder, and five children, in these hard times.

SOUL

Methinks ye might give to the succour of his soul,
ye, whom he hath half maintained.

WEAVER

Ay, that will I, though it take my last coin.

*[Goes into the house, and returns
instantly with a gold piece which he
casts into the bowl.]*

Take that. And God rest him.

[Weaver's wife appears at the door.]

WIFE

[In suppressed excitement]

What hast thou done there?

WEAVER

I gave our gold piece for masses to be sung to the
peace of my Lord's soul.

WIFE

What, dolt! Thou hast given all our savings!
It was to have bought me a farthingale.

SOUL

Not much, methinks, it was to give to one whose
bounty paid for your hearth and chimney.

WIFE

Who's to pay for it now, fellow?

SOUL

[Looking away from them]

A lost soul pays not for his hearth and home.

WEAVER

Tell us, Brother, there be those that say the old
Lord died without our Holy Religion.

SOUL

He died as he did live, his thoughts all for benefit
and bounty to the living.

WEAVER

Good lack, good lack!

WIFE

And there be those that say the young Lord will
die as he liveth, a miser.

SOUL

He will think twice, ere he give what his father
gave, without thought at all.

WIFE

God help us! [*To Weaver*] See now what thou
hast done! We have nothing to look for from
live folk. . . .

WEAVER

Nay.

WIFE

And thou hast given our hearth to the dead!

WEAVER

I am no friend to ghosts and hobgoblins.

WIFE

Nor I, nor shall the children be.

SOUL

Hearken, [*pushes between them into the door*] should I
now place a stool here in your chimney, would
ye not receive his outcast soul?

*[Weaver and wife stand agape. Soul
moves toward the chimney, and is
swiftly followed by the wife, who seizes
a hearth broom and beats him out.
Soul moans bitterly.]*

WIFE

Out, out, thou crazy pate. Get thee gone to the
Abbey with our gold. Bide not here, thou
gibbet sprite, frightening us with thy graveyard
tales!

[Beats him again with the broom.]

SOUL

Woman, is that thy hearth broom?

WIFE

My hearth broom, ay, that it is. Dost thou like
the feel of it?

*[The tavern door is thrown open, and
all those within tumble into the street;
likewise that of the house beyond,
whence issues a woman with two boys
whom she clutches by the sleeves.]*

TAVERN KEEPER

What is this racket and to-do in the street, a night
when I am keeping my tavern peaceable, and
my Lord lying unburied over in the Abbey
yonder.

[To Soul]

What's there in thy bowl, Brother?

WIFE

It's a good gold crown piece, I'll have you to know,
that was to have bought me a new green
fathingale.

WEAVER

Nay, 'twas for the chimney tax.

WIFE

But that my husband must out and cast it into the
bowl of this pestilent fellow. I warrant you he
knows not his beads yet, the way he gabbles
of ghosts and hobgoblins.

WEAVER

I gave him the coin for masses to my Lord's soul.

WIFE

Yea, but after he got our good gold, he would have
us to take my Lord's ghost down the chimney.

TAVERN KEEPER

Hey day, Brother, what hast thou to say to all this?
I see you wear the garb of the Abbey.

SOUL

[Who has been standing quite still, with sad, intelligent eyes.]

I came for peace to the soul of the dead. Have any folk among you, ye, the friends he fought for, in battles bloodless and bloody—have you aught to contribute to his soul?

[Silence]

He stopped the taxes on your fulleries in the convent stream, fighting in King's court. Was that naught to you?—you that are growing rich and smug in consequence? He hath bestowed upon each one of you some personal and private benefit. Is he dear to none of you?

[Silence]

Methinks that you, Jack Strong, have something to remember him, you that now feast upon his pension from the wars.

JACK STRONG

He did full right to pension me. I fought long, and set up his standard in nine battles. I lost a leg in his last skirmish. And now he is dead I may look to the moon to pension me.

SOUL

Well sayest thou.

DICK DODGE

[Cutting capers, and taking a prayerful attitude.]

I have looked to the moon many a long year.

SOUL

Methinks that thou, Dick Dodge, hast also somewhat to

DICK DODGE

You would speak of that pig of mine, my Lord's hounds harried, Hallowe'en.

SOUL

Nay, I would speak of the fat young shoat he gave thee, in recompense for the old swine thou madest moan about.

DICK DODGE

Ay, 'twas a scurvy swine enough, but I am fattening of it still, so that the new Lord's hounds may

get a tooth at it. [*Tosses a coin over his shoulder into the bowl.*] May that put the dead through the first pains of Purgatory.

TAVERN KEEPER

[*Returning from a trip to his till.*]

And may that put him through the middle. [*Tosses in another coin.*]

SOUL

[*To both, slowly.*]

This, then, is the sum and price of his friendship unto you?

TAVERN KEEPER

He was my Landlord, and now his son is the same.

SOUL

Doomsday will never see the son sending the whole village to thy wine taps to make holiday.

TAVERN KEEPER

Come now, Brother, you have talked enough. Go

tune up your choir for the requiems. *Do re mi*,
and dance him out of Hell. Come, take your
coin and begone.

SOUL

Ah, I go. But there's no dance from Hell's in-
gratitude.

TAVERN KEEPER

Pile up the fire there, Tim Log.
In, fellows, in! . . . Ye'll all be drenched with the
rain.

[They all tumble in.]

WIFE

[To weaver.]

Seest thou how little the other folk bestowed?
And I had need of my green farthingale.

WEAVER

Nay, I had more need for the chimney tax.

*[They go in. The tavern door is
slammed, likewise those of the other
houses.]*

SOUL

[Holds the bowl high.]

Here rings the tax too heavy on your care,
Take this, and keep the hearth ye grudge to share.

[Dashes the coins against the weaver's door.]

Come, Soul, one body only waits to bear thy load.
Back, back, unto thy first and last abode.

[Goes out.]

SCENE IV

The chapel chancel, as before.

[*Enter Soul.*]

SOUL

Wake: Or I'll smite thy sleep?

BODY

[*Raises his hands feebly.*]

Thou . . . who art thou?
Some pauper old or young; to thee mine alms
Have given aid?

SOUL

Nay.

BODY

Nay? What then! My foe . . .
Is it mine enemy?

SOUL

Nay, Body, nay.

BODY

Thou, wife of my cold bosom . . . is it thou?

SOUL

Silence! Dull Body, open these dim eyes.
Here stands thy soul.

BODY

[*Half rises.*]

What! Fie, found you no welcome?

SOUL

Who welcomes storms and howls and midnight hail?
Thou'rt dead, since yesterday.

BODY

Is not my name
A name to conjure folk with in thy way?

SOUL

Thy name! It is a houseless dog i' the streets.

BODY

[*Falls back.*]

So soon.

SOUL

They prate of this good deed of thine,
And that. But me, thy Soul, they hold
As dear as mildew on the clouts they cast away,
Or cobwebs in their eaves.

BODY

So soon! Why still. .
Alack, I am unburied!

SOUL

Ha, and I — I would
With thee, be buried.

BODY

Out! Away! Begone!

SOUL

If one had smote me on the cheek, like this,
 And this, [*smites the Body*] and shown me that he
 knew me . . . Yea,
 I would have clasped and kissed that man. [*Smites
 again.*] Hear me!
 Like this . . . And shown me that he knew me . . .

BODY

What!

Will bitter hate suffice?

SOUL

Ay, bitter hate.

BODY

If gall and hatred help thee, get thee gone.
 Yea, haste thee to the aged Abbot Paul.

SOUL

Thy bitterest enemy.

BODY AND SOUL

BODY

My foe's own face.
See there, in flame thy likeness fixed; in hate
In hate illumined; in malignity,
Outwearying time.

SOUL

Token, pale Body, sign
And countersign, I'll take for this remembrance.

BODY

Tell him how here I lie. And, if my soul
Be to him mightier than a name,—he will
Forbid this body burial here. Begone. Time
wanes.

SOUL

[*In guttural accents.*]

Bide, thou hard Body. All the hate thou roused,
I'll raise again; or yet with thee be housed.

[*Goes out.*]

SCENE V

A narrow cell-like room, whitewashed. On the left wall is a small crucifix, a PRIE DIEU before it, with lighted candles. Along the middle wall is a narrow table with a plain ecclesiastical chair at each end. In the centre of the table is a pile of small books with large lighted tapers on either side. A door in this central wall is to right and left of each chair. The left door has a little window in it, showing it leads into the open.

The aged Abbot Paul, spare, and of saintly face, kneels before the crucifix, holding a missal, from which he reads:

ABBOT

Et remitte debitas nostras; sicut et nos remittimus
debitaribus nostris.

[Knocking at right-hand door. Abbot rises from his knees.]

[Enter Servant.]

SERVANT

Your Reverence, a strange brother, from Saint
Michael's Abbey, would speak with you.

ABBOT

Would speak with me?

SERVANT

I told him you were wont to be at your devotions at this hour. But he comes afoot—long distance—in the rain; and he urges business of importance.

ABBOT

Let him come in; and give him dry shoes.

[*Exit Servant.*]

[*Abbot lays the open missal on the table, and seats himself on the left hand chair, clasps his hands in front of him, and bows his head, with his eyes searching the far distance, as though in difficult recollection. Enter the Soul by the right-hand door. He stands watching the Abbot, scouringly.*]

ABBOT

[*Glancing round.*]

Good Even, son, *pax te cum*, my poor son.
What brings you hither, drenched thus, with the
rain?

SOUL

Matter of ancient standing, instant moment,
And everlasting consequence.

ABBOT

Sit down.

[*Soul takes the empty seat, and looks at the Abbot.*]
Say on, my son.

SOUL

I wear, as you must see,
St. Michael's garb.

ABBOT

Yea, I observed the garb.

[*Sits looking straight in front of him, as though hearing
a confession.*]

SOUL

I come for your opinion . . . on a point . . .
Ecclesiastical.

ABBOT

Proceed, my son.

SOUL

[Leaning towards the Abbot.]

I'd have you tell me, as at your last hour,
What penalty befalls the soul of him
Whose body is forbidden sacred burial.

*[Looks hard at the Abbot, who does not turn, but listens
as at the confessional.]*

ABBOT

The bodies of believers, you're aware,
Are set in sacred soil. . . .

SOUL

[With a sneering glance.]

So I've been schooled.

ABBOT

There to await the hour of resurrection.

SOUL

You'd deem it then, a most dire punishment,
That would deny a corpse this privilege?

ABBOT

Most dire.

SOUL

You could not wish worse chastisement
Unto your bitterest enemy?

ABBOT

[Turning toward the Soul.]

My son, why no.

Why, no,

SOUL

Enough! If you'll condone
A short digression, I'll return at once,
Unto this point.

ABBOT

Proceed, my son, proceed.

SOUL

You see me here, a Brother of the Abbey.

ABBOT

Ay.

SOUL

Whose novitiate hath in part been spent
Upon the chronicles of this said abbey.

ABBOT

They bear inspection.

SOUL

[Looking sidewise and scrutinizing.]

So your Rev'ence need
Not marvel . . . should I now rehearse . . .
events . . .
Of your own life.

ABBOT

My life hath been to me
As marvelous as Stations of the Cross.
But mere rehearsing it would scarce amaze me.

SOUL

Oh, such details alone are requisite
As coincide with a biography
Still darklier known to me.

[*Pause.*]

ABBOT

Proceed, my son.

SOUL

How did the night look to you of that day
When from the King's Bench tumbled a decree
Exempting the whole township from the taxes
Upon the fulleries in your Convent streams?
And twice a third of all your perquisites
Was clean wiped from the books.

ABBOT

It was a dark,
Dark night, my son. We'd starved to pay those
debts.

SOUL

My Lord, in what esteem hold you that man
Who set the townfolk on to this?

ABBOT

The man?

SOUL

Souls of the mighty, were you not aware
The law was framed and foisted by a peer? . . .
They had as counsellor and advocate,
A peer of the realm?

*[Abbot bows his head and lifts his eyes with an intense
gaze.]*

One question more.

[Silence.]

Who wrote
And countersigned the mandate of the King
That drove you forth, as one unfit to fold
The sheep of God?

*[Abbot wrings his hands and, closing his eyes, bows his
head still lower.]*

Who brought the royal parchment to demand
Instant consignment of an Abbot's ring?

[Abbot covers his eyes.]

Swear now, when you withdrew it from your finger,
Ay, and the sun went scarlet down the coast
Of this your abbey, what blinded you,
Save scalding tears, to see, striding on shore,
In tumult of acclaim, your lifelong enemy?

[Silence.]

*[Then the Abbot takes his hands from his eyes and
raises his head.]*

ABBOT

The enemies of God, and of his Church
Are without count.

SOUL

But thine! . . . that thou dost hate.

ABBOT

As at the Judgment Day,
I hope my trespasses shall be forgot.

[Turns his head away, shaking.]

My foe and his iniquity are fled.

SOUL

[Springs to his feet and strides past the Abbot.]

Forgot, forgot, **FORGOT**, thou hypocrite!
Nay, say thy suppliant sighs snuff out, like these,
And these.

[Blows out the tapers in front of the crucifix.]

But say not Lord Barcardon.....

ABBOT

*[Seizes one of the tall tapers by his side and rushes to
to the crucifix.]*

God

Deliver thee, by this his Crucified!

[Relights the tapers.]

Down on thy knees, thou Spirit of Perdition!
Down on thy knees, I say.

*[Holding the taper high, he presses the Soul to one knee,
who looks up in his face.]*

SOUL

Callest thou me

A Spirit of Perdition?

[Abbot holds the candle close to the face of the kneeling Soul.]

ABBOT

Whosoe'er

Thou be, or monk or fiend, blaspheming God.
Thou art a soul that's lost.

SOUL

[Rising.]

Old man, I'll smite

Thee in the face, if thou repeat it.

ABBOT

Nay,

I name thee not. But, if in truth you come
Upon affairs ecclesiastical,
If Ghostly Counsel you, in truth, do seek;
I will acquaint you, wisely as I may,
And so Godspeed you from your pilgrimage.

SOUL

Dost know the soul of Lord Barcardon walks
The earth? Dost know thine ancient enemy
Lies dead . . .

[*Silence.*]

[*Abbot sets the taper down and holds the table tightly.*]

And waits his burial in stones
Of thine own abbey?

ABBOT

[*Leaning over for support on his stiffened, out-stretched
arms.*]

Now my God, my God!

SOUL

With four and twenty candles is his face
Illumined.

ABBOT

Oh, my God!

SOUL

High requiems
Are to be sung for him.
It cannot be!

SOUL

And in the morn, incense shall hide the heads
Of multitudes that bow as he is buried.

ABBOT

[Clenches his hand.]

No!

SOUL

[Stepping nearer.]

Unless—you do forbid this desecration.

*[Abbot clutches his hands behind him
and opens his eyelids wide.]*

SOUL

[Stepping still nearer.]

And I bear back your interdict.

[Abbot begins to pace about the room, the Soul hard after him, turning this way and that, to confront him.]

ABBOT

Get thee

Behind me, Satan!

SOUL

High and deep his tomb

And effigy they build.

ABBOT

Get thee behind me.

[Kneels suddenly before the crucifix, clasping his hands high above his head.]

Shall I enumerate my paltry enemies?

SOUL

[Strikes the kneeling Abbot.]

Speak! Is he but thy paltry enemy?

ABBOT

His body is already *[Long pause]* but as dust.
And his lost soul, God pity it, . . . is rain

[Pointing to the door.]

That beats for mercy where it may.

[Soul rushes through the door. His voice is heard crying out:]

SOUL

Ho! Water gusts and murk! Ho! Midnight rain!
A proud, proud Lord beats back to you again.
Ho! Water gusts and murk! Ho! Midnight rain!
A soul that's lost beats back to you again.

SCENE VI

The chapel, as before.

BODY

[Outstretched as before]

Sleep, speak. What sound of feet? Speak, foot-
steps, speak!

Wife of my bosom . . . thou? *[Rising upon an arm]*
Or is't mine enemy?

[Enter Soul]

SOUL

Thy foeman feasts his aged fantasy,
Where name of thine is nothingness. Lie down.
Thy bones and thee, to him, are as the smoke
Of all the charnel of the world.

BODY

So I

Am dead indeed.

BODY AND SOUL

SOUL

Thou dead, I worse than dead.
Thou SHALT take me to sleep.
[Draws closer to the Body]

BODY

Away, wild soul!
Thee here, like incense choke—I cannot sleep!
I feel the touch of her, sweet weight of this
My breast. *[Half rises and falls]*

Ha, thou hast tortured me! Go, go!
Go to my wife who said she loved the thing
She called immortal. Bid her come to speak
Each night in secrecy, above my tomb,
With my immortal soul.

SOUL

Token, thou Corpse.
What pledge shall be, ere thou lie buried?

BODY

Yea,
The watch is set. The dawn draws nigh. The
stone
Right soon shall hide my sleep.

SOUL

Speak, clod of clay!

Set me my token!

BODY

[Laughs hoarsely]

“Token,” still a “token.”

SOUL

Token I'll take, more binding than the earth
Unto the storm-beat pine.

BODY

Then summon her,
Before the dawn to plight me with a kiss.

[Holds out his hand]

This ring thou knowest. Take it and repeat
Her word, the night she placed it on my ^{right} hand,

[Sighing]

Oh, years ago, when we were young.

[Soul takes the ring]

SOUL

“Round for an emblem of eternity.”
These were the words she spoke to thee and me.
Hark! If it bind her not before the morn,
I’ll buried lie, with thee, as I was born.

[Goes out]

SCENE VII

The entrance to Barcardon Hall. A stair runs along the central wall, and beneath the stair is a heavy Gothic door; at the left a smaller door. At either end of a bench on the low landing lie Audrey and Basil, asleep. The Soul opens the great door, closes it softly and stands, looking at the children. Audrey wakes and looks at him.

Enter Constance from the left. She stands a moment, wide-eyed, while the Soul gazes at her. Audrey softly wakes Basil and leads him reluctantly up the stair. Constance watches them, then turns to Soul, and clasps her hands in entreaty.]

CONSTANCE

And now, young Reverend Master, say me brief,
I know what brought you here.

[Soul stands speechless, looking into her eyes.]

You dream not what
I pride my heart to pledge.

SOUL

Nay.

CONSTANCE

You would say

My dear Lord died unshriven. You would say,
His soul is still in torment. You would say,
Long requiems must be sung, ere he can rest.

SOUL

I say all this.

CONSTANCE

So be it. Fear you not.
There is no price nor payment you require,
No, no sharp sacrifice, but I will make it.

SOUL

You do not ask what I require.

CONSTANCE

[*Kneels*]

Ask, ask!

SOUL

I ask a fearsome requisition.

CONSTANCE

Name it.

The price! 'Tis little unto you to name.
However great for me, it shall be given.
Hark, men there be fainting from hunger, yet
They bear unto their brood stout provender:
Shall I not pledge my park of vension?
Women there be frost bleeding: whilst their babes
Lie warm. Shall I not pawn my miniver?

[Unclasps her girdle]

Take this, as plight of all I owe. The clasp
Is sapphire, deep-engraved. My bridegroom's gift,
The night I tripped upon the threshold there,
A bride.

[Thrusts it toward Soul]

What, do you doubt what I will do?
I am a marquis' daughter, and my chests
Contain jasper, and jacinth, coronet
Of pearl, the gifts and heritage of her
That loved him.

SOUL

“Loved” . . . and love him? Do

You think you love him?

CONSTANCE

What! [*Rising from her knees*]

My soul and body, death
Is dire. Art come to make of me a thing
Of infamy? Are not his children mine?
Are these no tokens of my love?

SOUL

Dust, dust!
They are but dust, compounded quick with clay,
Like to your Lord's cold body. Is the love
You bid me count on, counted but in dust? . . .
The dust of dower jewels, dust of men?

CONSTANCE

[*Sinking against the stair*]

What will your Rev'rence? I have done. God
knows
I loved him.

SOUL

[Starting back, and covering his eyes.]

God!

CONSTANCE

He that knows all things knows
This too.

SOUL

He that knows all things!

[Uncovering his eyes]

Ah, what smoke
Is that you called your Lord, the cloud you loved!

CONSTANCE

It is a spirit disembodied.

SOUL

And
You think you'll know it?

CONSTANCE

Ay.

SOUL

In whatso guise

'Tis found?

CONSTANCE

I do so think, as my soul lives.

SOUL

So spoke the weaver and the tavern keeper.

CONSTANCE

How?

SOUL

Thou . . ah, wife of his dead bosom . . thou!
What wilt thou do . . . more than the tavern
keeper?

CONSTANCE

More than the tavern keeper!

SOUL

Is it much
To ask of you . . . more than the weaver
grudged? . . .
More than the tavern keeper?

CONSTANCE

Sir, these folk
I know not. Seek not so to silence me!

SOUL

The test is close upon thee.

CONSTANCE

Sir, I wait.

SOUL

Woman, thou canst not meet his glazing eye:
Where wilt thou meet the soul of thy dead Lord?

CONSTANCE

I know not. But by God, I'll follow it.

SOUL

Through midnight and perdition?

CONSTANCE

Priest, each day

Is night to me, while he is lost.

SOUL

Each night

You'll meet his soul, his lost and homeless soul,
Above the tomb where buried lies his body?

CONSTANCE

Strange talk you make, strange priest. But I
would go
Beneath the wells and caverns of the earth
To find him.

SOUL

And you'll pledge more than the gems
About your heart to this?

CONSTANCE

*[Looking at the girdle, clasps it about
her heart and holds her hands on the
clasp.]*

I'll pledge the life

My girdle binds.

SOUL

So. Will you set the seal
Upon his body with a kiss?

[Constance starts back]

CONSTANCE

'Tis gone. Anointed for the burial. His corpse!

SOUL

[Covers his eyes]

Yea, but an hour ere day. *[Uncovers his face]*
The time is short.

[Constance falters toward him.]
[Soul points to the door]

Wilt out in the wild rain, and pledge his mouth
E'er morn?

CONSTANCE

His body! What can his dear *body*
Now avail?

SOUL

But you anointed it,
And left this ring upon his hand.

[Holds out the ring]

CONSTANCE

[with clasped hands, looks at it, half terrified.]

My ring!

SOUL

'Tis but an hour since it hath left his finger.
When was it set thereon?

CONSTANCE

The night, ay me!
The night he clasped this gem about my heart.

*[Lays her hand again on the girdle
clasp.]*

SOUL

And you did place this ring on him, and swear:—

CONSTANCE

That through death's whirlwind and the seven seas,
If it were sent. . . .

SOUL

Yea, yea?

CONSTANCE

Yea, yea, that ring
Would fetch me to his side.

SOUL

What more?

CONSTANCE

What more?

BODY AND SOUL

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SOUL

Say on, say on.

CONSTANCE

Holding to the stair]

Nay, my mind swims.

SOUL

Forgot!

The emblem!

CONSTANCE

Round . . .

SOUL

“Round as the emblem of

CONSTANCE

Round as the emblem of . . .

SOUL

“Eternity.”

CONSTANCE

[Starting towards him]

Whence know you this?

SOUL

You'll forth with me? I wait.

CONSTANCE

No priest hath heard this at confessional.
Whence know you this. But say me this! But say,
And I will follow. Speak!

SOUL

Wife, I that speak,
I, I, am the lost soul of thy dead Lord.

[Constance follows him in fear, looking in his face.]

Gaze deep 'Tis I . . . I . . . I . . . thy Lord.

*[Suddenly laying his hand upon a
poignard on the wall.]*

Thou flesh and blood,
Thou woman, must I pierce thy side, ere thou
Mayst see?

[He holds the poignard poised to strike. Constance stands with palms stretched on either side. He clenches the poignard tighter and tighter as she speaks.]

CONSTANCE

Strike, strike, slay flesh, set blood at peace.
And when these hands that soothed his head are
still,
As wise Penelope's . . .

SOUL

My life was . . . yes,
My death is still in those soft hands. Speak, speak!

CONSTANCE

These lips he

[Breaks into a sob]

SOUL

Pressed

CONSTANCE

Even in dreams . . . When they
Are cold as . . . those of Heloise now be . . .

[Closes her eyes]

SOUL

Then, then?

CONSTANCE

[Gasping, presses her hand to her side]

When heart beats leap no longer at his name. . . .

SOUL

Then?

CONSTANCE

Call upon my stark, denuded soul,
And if his soul shall know me, then my soul
Shall know his soul. Strike, and God witness.

SOUL

[Throws down the poignard]

God!

CONSTANCE

[Faintly]

Wherefore do you not strike?

SOUL

And if . . . I knew you not?

[Constance gazes at him, stretches out her arms, then drops them. Her head droops, and she falls in a swoon. Soul looks down on her.]

And if I knew you not, O my Beloved!—
As you, who loved me, knew not me!

[Hurls himself from the door, moaning.]

Deep is the nightmare that no lips can wake,
Dark the abyss no torch of love can break,
Frightful the sea whose shore is but the foam,
Gaunt is the road that never winds toward home.
Speed, speed, before my dust in dust shall lie.
Speed, speed, unto the dead where I would die.

SCENE VIII

The chapel: — now suffused by daylight from the windows of the apse. Through incense smoke is seen a crowd standing about the open grave at the foot of the chancel, into which the Body is being lowered, amid the sounds of a requiem. Here, the Soul rushes in, and stands in agony as he watches the sprinkling of the dust, and the lowering of the grave-stone. At the passing of the crowd, he wrings his hands above the grave and then stumbles away, toward the North transept. Of a sudden, as he passes beneath the high crucifix, he lifts his face to it and, with a loud cry, falls backward to the ground. His brother watchers rush forward and throw Holy Water in his face.

FIRST BROTHER

Now, then, more water there! So. See, he wakes.

SECOND BROTHER

'Tis a foul business, this: this watch o' night
O'er dead folk.

THIRD BROTHER

Of wine. All he needs is a good stoup

SECOND BROTHER

Ay, fetch it.

[Exit third Brother]

FIRST BROTHER

Here, a hand here.

SECOND BROTHER

There
Now, thou art on thy feet.

THIRD BROTHER

[Bearing a cup, and proffering it]

Red wine. 'Twill cure
Thee of the ghost ague. Come now, a song?

SECOND BROTHER

We'll all to sacristy, and have a song.

SOUL

[Repulses them: so that they take frightened attitudes]

Nay, Brothers mine, no cup for me,
No wine, nor song, not revelry;
Till I have preached a tale to you,
Whose text is strange, but strange and true.
For whilst I guarded yonder bier,
The dead man's spirit smote me here,
And raised me up to walk the earth,
As I had breathed at his own birth;
Yea, died his death, and lost my soul,
In live perdition, deathless dole.
So I besought my corpse again,
To lie with him, and ease my pain.

But he, relentless, cast me forth
With friend and foe to try my worth.
To friend and foe, and her my wife,
Who sought me with the torch of life.
A sunless planet of the night,
I faced unseen her burning sight.
Two wanderers of the night were we,
Lost each to each eternally.
Unknown to her, and known to none
I came before the dead alone.

Too late, methought, too late, came I,
He buried was: I could not die.

By yonder cross, I sped away. . .

*[Turns and raises his clasped hands
to the crucifix.]*

When he who made both night and day
And bones of men that buried are,
And souls that leap from star to star,
He answered me, when I did cry,
 And heaved me to his heart on high.
 Where from afar I saw through tears,
 All man's desire through endless years.
 My pains, in that heart's blood, were writ:
 My hopes, in those flame eyes, were lit:
 High God who gave himself in pain,
 'Twas God who gave me all again,
 The voice of friend, the kiss of wife,
 The soothe of death, the song of life.
 And all my ways, through trackless space,
 No longer lost before His face.

*[Turns to the others in quick, sharp
accents]*

Now more to you I may not tell.
This body swooned, ye know right well.
But I must preach, both far and near,

What I, this night, have suffered here:
That all men doomed to live for aye,
Should not be lost from God on High,
His Body there hung high in dole,
His Holy Ghost, His Living Soul.

THE END



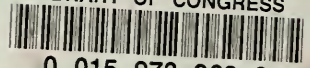
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